

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TEL AVIV 002119

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iraq

Key stories in the media:

All media highlighted the situation in Iraq. (Maariv's banner: "America in Trouble"; banners in Yediot and Hatzofe evoke the "Iraqi quagmire.") At least 150 Iraqis and 40 Americans were killed in Wednesday's fighting. Jerusalem Post quoted leaders of Moqtada al-Sadr's Shi'ite militia in Baghdad as saying Wednesday that Palestinian fedayeen fighters have joined the ranks of the rebel Mahdi Army. Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post reported on anti-American demonstrations in the territories.

Yediot and Globes led with what Israel could get in exchange from the U.S. for its disengagement plan: both newspapers reported that the U.S. Administration is considering granting Israel billions of USD to develop the Negev and to fight terrorism. Yediot cited up-to-date GOI assessments that the disengagement plan could cost 4 to 5 billion shekels (around USD 900 million to 1.1 billion). Jerusalem Post and other media reported that Wednesday British PM Tony Blair became the first European leader to clearly back PM Sharon's disengagement plan. Reporting that Blair called Sharon, Jerusalem Post wrote that a British diplomatic official confirmed that the conversation took place, but that he would not reveal any details.

Ha'aretz reported (lead story in its English Ed.) that the Hamas, Patah and Islamic Jihad leaderships in Gaza have prepared a still non-binding draft "National Plan" that "emphasizes the right to use violence to oppose the occupation and the settlements, while avoiding turning civilians from either side into targets for attack."

Jerusalem Post reported that Wednesday the PA rejected a U.S. warning against integrating Hamas and Islamic Jihad into its political structure, saying that Washington has no right to interfere in its internal affairs. Ha'aretz reported that militant Palestinian groups, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants, will resume discussions on the Gaza Strip Saturday. The newspaper notes that interest in this meeting has been heightened by Hamas's agreement in principle to join the PLO and the PA.

Ha'aretz reported that five terrorist attacks took place in the first quarter of 2004, in a descending curve since 40 attacks occurred in the first quarter of [1](#)2002. The newspaper says that Hamas is still looking for a flaw in the security system to perpetrate what it regards as a suitable act of retribution for the killing of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Jerusalem Post quoted Brig. Gen. (res.) Dani Arditi, Sharon's adviser on counterterrorism, as saying that Israelis are becoming too complacent about security and that they are ignoring warnings to steer clear of dangerous sites. Ha'aretz reported that Sunday a Palestinian youth from the Balata refugee camp on the West Bank died of wounds sustained during clashes with IDF troops the day earlier. The newspaper also reported that Wednesday two Israeli and some 20 Palestinian demonstrators were moderately injured in clashes with IDF soldiers during protests against the construction of the separation fence at Biddu village, northwest of Jerusalem. Israel

Radio reported that the police have arrested 10 young members of an extremist branch of Bratzlav ultra-Orthodox for attacking and beating up Arabs in Jerusalem over the recent period.

Ha'aretz reported that the GOI has approved a new, tougher, directive for the monitoring of nuclear, biological and chemical materials, which follows guidelines used in Western countries.

Yediot cited Thai government warnings of possible attacks of tourist sites by Muslim extremists. The newspaper cited a GOI travel advisory for Thailand. Yediot and other media reported that last week an extremist Muslim group, the "European-Arab League," warned that organizations such as Hamas could attack the Jewish community of Antwerp, Belgium, if it does not denounce Israel's policy.

Over the past few days, the media cited claims by Roman Catholic Church officials that Israel has delayed granting visas to dozens of Roman Catholic clergy. Leading media noted that Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah called it an issue of survival for the church in the Holy Land.

Ha'aretz reported that the Defense Ministry is investigating a complaint that a company called Globus Aviation Ltd. was involved in a transaction in which surplus IDF helicopters ended up in Columbia, where they could have fallen into the hands of criminal elements.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Not since the Balfour Declaration has there been a document that has raised so many expectations as the one President George Bush is supposed to give Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.... One should not take the Bush letter too seriously."

Liberal columnist Yehuda Litani wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Both the Israeli establishment and the Palestinian establishment are adamantly opposed to the activity [of Palestinian moderates]."

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The [Tunis] summit collapsed because the Arab world has changed in the past decade beyond recognition."

Block Quotes:

I. "Balfour to Bush, Vietnam to Israel"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (April 8): "Not since the Balfour Declaration has there been a document that has raised so many expectations as the one President George Bush is supposed to give Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, detailing American quid pro quos for the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and four isolated settlements in the northern West Bank.... On his way to his meeting with Bush in Washington, Sharon ought to read 'The Palace File,' which documents how the U.S. abandoned its closest ally in Asia, South Vietnam, where so many tens of thousands of American servicemen died fighting for its independence.... There are many worlds of difference between South Vietnam and Israel. Israel has never asked America to fight for it and die for it. But despite the differences in the circumstances, it is difficult to ignore the historical lesson: political promises are meant to solve urgent political problems and are always only good for the moment they are made. Don't regard them as a 'political insurance policy'.... So why entrap the Americans into articles of an agreement that will never be formed? It is doubtful that a Democratic administration would honor the Bush letter.... For all those reasons, it is evident that one should not take the Bush letter too seriously. Its importance will evaporate with the closing of the Likud referendum poll, when the disengagement plan is brought to the government for its approval."

II. "Moderates Crushed Between Hammer and Anvil"

Liberal columnist Yehuda Litani wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 8): "If Prof. Sari Nusseibeh had a private army, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades would not dare threaten him.... Caught between a rock and a hard place, the Palestinians who support dialogue are not even capable of making a faint sound. They still remember the lynching that was nearly staged against Palestinian activists who participated in the signing ceremony of the Geneva Accord, and narrowly escaped this fate upon returning to Gaza. If some of their brothers view them as traitors, many Israelis believe that they are a 'gimmick,' that there is no difference between them and the extremist Palestinians; their goal is the same, Israel's destruction, and only their tactics are different. Both the Israeli establishment and the Palestinian establishment are adamantly opposed to their activity. In our bloody ethnic conflict, as in other similar conflicts from India to Ireland, the only question is: Are you with us or against us? White or black. Shades of gray fade, dissipate and at times are even wiped out."

III. "A Different Middle East is Forming Before Our Very Eyes"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 8): "The [Tunis] summit collapsed because the Arab world has changed in the past decade beyond recognition.... A different Middle East is forming before our very eyes: countries and groups that once were dominant and deciding forces have become marginal, while the former members of the periphery have become the center. These changes are of immense strategic importance. Neither Egypt nor Syria lead the entire Arab world in their footsteps any longer, as we assumed to be the case just a decade or two ago. Perhaps on the contrary. Perhaps ties with the 'peripheral' states will ultimately prompt Syria or Egypt to truly reconcile themselves to reality. Moreover, the Palestinians, Egypt and Syria have lost their veto power over Israel's ties in the region. As a consequence, the price Israel will be forced to pay for ties with the Arabs has changed as well.... That does not mean that Israel needs to adopt a condescending and reckless Middle Eastern policy and to heedlessly exploit the Arab confusion.... The Arab dissolution should also spark sober Israeli thinking. Among themselves, they are incapable of reaching mutual trust; no Arab country has normal, intrigue-less relations with any other Arab country. Is it even remotely likely that they will forge romantic peace relations based on reconciliation, recognition and coexistence with Israel, the ultimate enemy? Thus, the collapse of the Arab summit is also a lesson for us not about what is to be desired in the Middle East, but about what exists and what is possible in the Middle East."

12. Iraq:

Summary: -----

Veteran op-ed writer Yaron London opined in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The Americans will eventually leave Iraq, whether they win the battle or lose it, but we will continue to live in the same neighborhood as our victims. The perpetual proximity compels us to adhere to different rules of behavior than those the American passers-by can allow themselves."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "That kind of reaction [by the Iraqi Governing Council] should make clear to the Americans just how powerful an Iraqi government they'll need to hand over responsibility to at the end of June."

Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former Foreign Ministry director-general Shlomo Avineri wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "Should three states arise [in Iraq] there could be a chance for stability of some kind."

Yoav Frummer wrote from New York in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Bush still has one last political trump card in his pocket -- that of a war president. Continued deterioration of the situation in Iraq and the dispatching of additional troops overseas would cost Bush not only his last cards, but also his position."

Block Quotes:

I. "Why Is It Permitted For the Americans?"

Veteran op-ed writer Yaron London opined in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 8): "Malicious joy is not a laudable emotion, but it is easy to understand the anger over the fact that giants are judged by forgiving standards, while midgets are subject to stringent standards. The American giant is not afraid to call the punitive operation in Fallujah by the name of 'revenge,' while we would never admit this motive, which originates in a boiling heart and paralyzed brain. Indeed, they are permitted what we are barred from doing. And what is the lesson? We will ignore the moral issues and concentrate on the practical questions: the Americans will eventually leave Iraq, whether they win the battle or lose it, but we will continue to live in the same neighborhood as our victims. The perpetual proximity compels us to adhere to different rules of behavior than those the American passers-by can allow themselves."

II. "A War Waged For Prestige in Iraq"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (April 8): "[Fallujah]'s 300,000 residents have been under curfew for three days and under cover of that curfew American forces are going house to house to find the terrorists responsible for the lynching of four Americans and the mutilation of their bodies. Finding those responsible has become a matter of prestige for the American armed forces, who could yet turn the campaign in Fallujah into one of those watershed moments that characterize many wars, when a city or site becomes a symbol.... Meanwhile, the impotence of the Iraqi Governing Council is patently evident. It has been unable to calm the situation and a few council members are making do with calls for a probe of the activities of the American forces, and at least two council members have threatened to resign. That kind of reaction should make clear to the Americans just how powerful an Iraqi government they'll need to hand over responsibility to at the end of June."

III. "Iraq: Mission Impossible"

Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former Foreign Ministry director-general Shlomo Avineri wrote in Yediot Aharonot (April 8): "The current increasing hardships endured by the Americans in Iraq are evidence of the hopelessness of the attempt to establish democracy in a society that utterly lacks the foundations needed for that purpose.... During the last decade the Kurds have enjoyed a de-facto autonomy sponsored by the U.S. They have established a regime that performs in an impressive fashion. It is doubtful whether they would agree to find themselves again under an Arab regime.... The current violence in Iraq is indeed directed at the Americans and their allies, but this is in fact a domestic civil war symbolizing the end of Sunni hegemony in Iraq. In such a situation, something can be learned from the example of Yugoslavia.... It won't be easy to convince the international community -- the U.S. in a first stage -- that it will be very hard to reestablish a united Iraq, the original British dream of 'Mesopotamia.' Should three states arise -- a Kurdish one in the north, an Arab-Sunni one in the center and an Arab-Shi'ite one in the south -- there could be a chance for stability of some kind. If this doesn't happen, what would be awaiting Iraq would be what characterized Yugoslavia in the '90s. That lesson had better be learned."

IV. "Cracks in Bush's Armor"

Yoav Frummer wrote from New York in popular, pluralist Maariv (April 8): "A quick glance at the years of George Bush's presidency over the largest superpower in the world doesn't reveal a success story.... The American nation was ready to fight Iraqi terrorism -- but only to a point. This week's events, which revived memories from Vietnam that have for a long time reverberated under the surface anyway, were the last thing that the U.S. Administration needed seven months before the elections.... Despite his expected contest with John Kerry ... President Bush will be the man who will determine the results in November. As of now, his situation is far from being assured. But Bush still has one last political trump card in his pocket -- that of a war president. Continued deterioration of the situation in Iraq and the dispatching of additional troops overseas would cost Bush not only his last cards, but also his position."

